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TELEGRAM

June 02, 2004

To: No Action Addressee  
Action: Unknown  
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 1831 - UNKNOWN)  
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, ECON, KDEM  
Captions: None  
Subject: UAE - TALK OF REFORM IN ADVANCE OF THE G8 SUMMIT  
Ref: None

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 01831

SIPDIS  
CXABU:  
ACTION: POL  
INFO: PAO RSO AMB DCM P/M ECON  
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INFO: PAO

DISSEMINATION: POL  
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:MMWAHBA  
DRAFTED: POL:JFMAYBURY  
CLEARED: A/DCM:HOLSIN-WINDECKER ECON:OJOHN

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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4618  
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZG/ALL NATO POST COLLECTIVE  
RUCAACC/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 001831

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/PI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/02/2009  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [NATO](#) [KMPI](#) [TC](#)  
SUBJECT: UAE - Talk of reform in advance of the G8 Summit

Ref: (A) Lisbon 817, (B) State 106755, (C) Abu Dhabi  
1515, (D) State 103166, (E) State 86312, (F) Abu Dhabi  
923, (G) Abu Dhabi 906

Classified by Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba, reasons  
1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: There is a lively dialogue about the need for political, economic, and educational reforms in the UAE. We read about it in the local press, hear about it from our contacts, and we may be contributing

to it by sending Emiratis on Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) programs. In private meetings with A/S Burns during his visit to Abu Dhabi last March for the U.S.-UAE Strategic Partnership dialogue, the UAE's leadership commented favorably about the need for reforms. Publicly, Dubai Crown Prince Shaykh Mohammed bin Rashid told the World Economic Forum in Amman in May that reform is the key to economic problems the Arab world faces. Regardless of whether reform is Arab-inspired or U.S.-inspired, and regardless of whether reform comes sooner or later, it is a concept that is very much on people's minds here in the UAE.

12. (C) We have shared the G8 Greater Middle East documents with our government, business, and civil society contacts per Department and NEA Bureau instructions, urging our interlocutors to contribute to the dialogue and telling them that we valued their input. For whatever reasons, the response has been very limited. Nevertheless, we have tried to capture what some Emiratis have been saying about reforms in advance of the G8 Summit next week. We also have only limited information about the separate, but complementary proposal for a NATO cooperative security initiative with the region. End Summary.

Reform: Privately and publicly, leaders are for it  
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13. (C) Emiratis got their first glimpse of the Greater Middle East Initiative on February 29 when the local press published a draft of the GME that had been carried by the London-based Arabic daily "Al Hayat" on its Web site. Information and Culture Minister Shaykh Abdullah bin Zayed told A/S Burns during the latter's visit to Abu Dhabi for the Strategic Partnership dialogue on March 21 that the UAE would prefer to have an exchange of views on reforms earlier in the consultative process rather than reading about them in the press (ref F). Shaykh Abdullah went on to acknowledge that the region was in need of reform, but "it is not a thing we can do overnight." Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Shaykh Khalifa told A/S Burns later that day that each country can begin to evaluate its circumstances and priorities gradually, and added that the UAE welcomes any friend who wants to demonstrate how reform will benefit UAE society (ref G). The most public call for reform (though he did not specifically mention the UAE) came from Shaykh Mohamed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and Minister of Defense, who told the World Economic Forum in Amman on May 16 that administrative and political reform is the key to economic problems in the Arab world. Shaykh Mohamed added that young officials must take an active part in modernization and administrative reform. None of our regular contacts within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered any comment on GME-related documents that the Department asked us to share, including the various drafts of the "G8 Plan of Support for Reform" (refs B and E).

Civil society speaks out on reform  
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14. (C) UAE University political science professor Ebtisam Al-Kitbi did have some comments about the draft "G8 Plan of Support" and reform in general. At a GME conference hosted by the Portuguese and the Moroccans on May 19 in Lisbon (ref A), Al-Kitbi said that reforms are limited by Arab states because of strict controls, and that the response to globalization has been mostly from the radical fringe. She observed further that the events on 9/11 prompted the USG to use military might, but also to recognize the need to push for internal Arab reforms. Al-Kitbi said U.S. credibility is diminished in the Arab world.

15. (C) After reviewing the draft "G8 Plan of Support"

Al-Kitbi wrote to us on May 26 saying that the plan generally was excellent and satisfied the basic requirements for reform. However, she asked what mechanisms (e.g. carrot and stick approach) would be used to persuade GME countries to adopt reforms. Al-Kitbi was skeptical that leaders in the region would act on reforms unless pressured by the outside to do so. She said the G8 need to demonstrate that it is serious about adopting this plan of reforms. Al-Kitbi further recommended that the GME reform plan be supervised by international organizations. This way, she said, those in power would not be as inclined to oppose the reform plan as something coming from the U.S. or the West.

¶6. (C) Al-Kitbi also urged greater dialogue between Islamic groups and Arab governments or "neutral" Western organizations as a way to better understand what these groups want and why they turn to political violence. She said that excluding these groups from dialogue and dealing with them only from a security perspective would lead to more violence. Finally, Al-Kitbi sought clarification on the issue of assistance to civil society groups in the region (section 2.7 in the draft "G8 Plan of Support"). In her view, the plan should explain what type of assistance would be available for people in the region whose human rights are being violated.

¶7. (C) UAE University education professor Khalifa Al-Suweidi also offered comment on the "G8 Plan of Support." He said that the UAE is in a better position than many other Arab countries in terms of progress made on educational and economic reforms. "There have been small steps taken in the right direction," he said. Al-Suweidi added that the challenge will be how to implement the plan's recommendations according to the particular characteristics of each country.

¶8. (U) Aicha Sultan, a Dubai columnist for the Arabic "Al-Bayan" newspaper, wrote in her June 2 column that reform is an issue that has to be discussed and people should not create excuses for not pursuing reforms. Everyone in the Arab street knows about reform, there is no way to ignore it, she wrote. The attack at Al-Khobar in Saudi Arabia demonstrates among other things that Arab youth are very lost, she added, and the best way to counter violence is through educational and political reform.

NATO initiative: A complementary piece of GME

¶9. (C) The UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Under Secretary Abdullah Rashid and NATO Deputy Secretary

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General Alessandro Minuto Rizzo met in Brussels on May 17 on the margins of the EU-GCC annual consultative gathering. We understand from a readout of that meeting that the UAE and other GCC states were interested in NATO's proposal for a cooperative security initiative with countries in the region. Abdullah Rashid raised the possibility of a NATO-GCC relationship and said he considered a bilateral dialogue with NATO on security issues as a useful starting point. We had earlier communicated points in ref D with the UAEG, including the possibility of a visit by NATO Deputy SYG Rizzo to the region (ref C). We have heard nothing further from either NATO or the UAEG about further consultations.

Comment

¶10. (C) We have continued our dialogue on reform with senior host government officials, business, and civil

society using the papers and instructions sent to us by the Department and NEA Bureau. Government officials have attended the World Economic Forum, the EU-GCC gathering, and the Arab League, and in each case discussed or heard about reform. The UAE press publishes stories daily about the reform debate, and UAE academics are going to international conferences to address the issue. We will continue to encourage Emiratis to participate in MEPI programs just as they have done already by going to the Campaign School in Doha and the Women and the Law forum in Amman earlier this year.

WAHBA